

Immigrant Youth

in Canada



CANADIAN
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ON SOCIAL
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Immigrant Youth in Canada

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Highlights

- Between 1996 and 1998, an estimated 230,000 immigrant children and youth arrived in Canada. Nearly half came from Asia and the Pacific region. Many had little knowledge of English or French when they arrived. Recent young immigrants between the ages of 20 and 24 were more likely to speak English than were younger immigrants. Like their adult counterparts, immigrant children and youth generally stayed in large urban centres, especially Toronto, Vancouver and Montreal.
- Social support is extremely important to all young people, and particularly those who experience a major life change such as immigrating to a new country. Findings from the National Population Health Survey show that the majority of both immigrant and Canadian-born youth reported feeling loved and cared for in their daily lives. However, recent immigrants were less likely to have someone in whom they could confide compared to both Canadian-born youth and young immigrants who had been in Canada for a longer period of time.
- Recent immigrant youth were more involved in religious activities and they placed greater emphasis on religious faith in their daily lives than did Canadian-born youth. But these differences diminished as immigrant youth became more integrated into their new country.
- In focus groups conducted for this project among recent immigrant youth in three major Canadian cities, most displayed a remarkable ability to adapt to their new country. Generally, they said they felt fairly well integrated into the society and they were happy to be in Canada. However, the vast majority of focus group participants said they found it difficult to feel totally accepted as Canadians because of their accents and their physical features.
- Recent immigrant youth viewed North American culture as a double-edged sword. Most said they enjoyed the freedom that the youth culture in Canada afforded them, but many felt somewhat overwhelmed and alienated by what they perceived to be its rampant consumerism and superficiality. Some said this caused them to feel socially isolated, particularly in high school.
- Recent immigrant youth reported that their key challenges were learning the language and overcoming social isolation. However, they felt their parents experienced more difficulties than they did in adapting, particularly with respect to finding gainful employment. These youth were keenly aware of their parents' struggles and hardships.
- School is at the centre of these young peoples' lives. The trials and tribulations of the often-difficult high school years – which most youth tend to encounter – were magnified for immigrant youth. Most reported experiencing some ostracism, bullying and difficulties with school work. Many felt that teachers and other staff constituted part of the problem, rather than being providers of solutions.
- Despite experiencing frustrations at school, most recent immigrant youth reported that their schools were successful in placing them in the appropriate class or level. They generally lauded English or French language classes (ESL and FSL) for their effectiveness in teaching students the language and for providing them with a place in which they could learn how to integrate into Canadian society.

-
- Most of the focus group participants reported experiencing racism and bigotry. This was especially so for those who were members of visible minority groups. For younger participants, this problem was experienced mainly at school; for older participants, it was encountered when looking for work. Many said that racial discrimination in Canada was generally disguised. They expressed little hope that racism and bigotry would ever be completely eliminated.
 - To varying degrees, recent immigrant youth reported using community agencies that served immigrants and health agencies. The most commonly used services were those that provided opportunities for immigrant youth to come together to socialize and participate in organized outings.
 - A survey of service providers conducted for this report indicated that most of the agencies had identified barriers to access among their immigrant clients. While steps have been taken to address these issues, most service providers acknowledged that there were still many unmet needs. Many agencies also experienced a decline in their financial and human resources in recent years, making service delivery more challenging.

Foreword:

The GAP

by Sharmila Biswas

Don't ever forget where you come from," was the standard prelude to most sermons in the Biswas home – a phrase I'm all too familiar with. In return, I would cheekily retort: "Dad – hello – I'm from Winnipeg." In all honesty, however, I really wasn't always sure. I knew my parents wanted my sister and I to hold onto our Indian roots, but for me, that heritage also included elements of Canada – which was, after all, the country into which I had been born.

Like many first generation Canadians, as a child of immigrant parents, I felt trapped: impelled to choose between embracing Canadian mainstream culture and my parents' values and traditions. After years of grappling with the issue, I think I've reached some balance, but intergenerational conflict is a daily reality and for many, it can be a source of alienation.

Sunita Das* came to Winnipeg from India with her family in 1977. She was five years old at the time. Today, she practices dentistry in Toronto, and although she had many of the same freedoms and liberties as her peers, issues around dating and boyfriends are still taboo subjects in her parents' home. "My parents left India almost 25 years ago, and their Indian values have remained frozen. But even Indian values in India have evolved since then," Das says.

Decisions about dating, career choices, education and marriage are usually individual decisions in the West. However, in many eastern cultures – Chinese and South Asian, in particular – parents make these life decisions for their children. As a result, many immigrant parents find western culture too liberal and they cannot comprehend – and find it highly disrespectful – when their children question or second-

guess their decisions. Some young people date behind their parents' backs, says Das. "You're not doing it to offend your parents, and you know you're not doing anything wrong. But you also know they will never understand."

Different ways of thinking, an ongoing need to question authority, openness to taboo subjects (like sex), and a need to establish independence all contribute to intergenerational conflicts. Sima Komeilinejad, an educator at CultureLink, a settlement services agency for newcomers in Toronto, deals with this type of conflict in particular.

The difference in acculturation rates can cause families to experience problems, Komeilinejad says. While children generally take a year to integrate comfortably into Canadian life, their parents can take three years or more, which magnifies the conflict and exacerbates alienation. "This doesn't mean they are bad parents," Komeilinejad stresses, "they just need time to learn to adapt."

Although eager to integrate into Canadian society, children of immigrant parents still face issues of low self-esteem, racism, isolation, no sense of belonging, and sometimes language problems. Lack of support at home makes these problems worse, sometimes causing aggressive or depressive behaviors and outlooks. Yet the parents often feel burdened and isolated too. Many of their "old world" cultures relegate individual needs and self reliance to the bottom of the priority pile; family needs and demands come first, and parental authority is thought to be infallible. The parents bear the extra challenge of trying to establish themselves economically and socially in a new land, while still holding on to their traditional authority over the family.

"I felt I couldn't identify with my own children," says Natalie Perez,* who came to Canada in the 1970s as a refugee from Chile. With \$15 in her pocket, she started a new life for herself and her two daughters, but "there

was a sense of disempowerment." Raising her children in Canada "was like going into a strange kitchen, someone is telling you to make something, and you don't know where anything is. Then, they leave you all alone."

Elsie Lam, a Chinese-Canadian, immigrated to Canada in 1988 from Hong Kong at the age of 12. Her biggest hurdle, she says, was trying to maintain power over career choice decisions. "My mother wanted me to be in an 'acceptable' profession like pharmacy, but my passion was art," she says. After Lam spent a miserable year trying to fulfill her mother's wishes, her mother realized how depressed and ill-suited Lam was to a pharmaceutical career, and she eventually supported her daughter's decision to become a graphic designer.

Proficiency in English and accessibility of information are two factors that also plague many immigrant parents. "Parental status is usually lowered when you have your 11-year-old translating for you," says Komeilinejad. According to *Enhancing Intergenerational Communication for Healthier Communities*, a 1999 report by the Sexuality Education Resource Centre (SERC) in Winnipeg, "when parents have less mastery of English than their children, they feel even more threatened and inadequate in dealing with parental challenges." Their insecurities are compounded because they often lack knowledge about Canadian culture, which frequently embarrasses their children, she says.

With her knowledge base and focus on youth programs, Komeilinejad says "it is impossible to help students with intergenerational issues without involving the parents. I put most of the blame on the parents – they are usually 99 per cent responsible for intergenerational conflicts." She says parents need to be more understanding, they need to trust their children's abilities, and learn to listen before giving in to the impulse to say "No."

Although it was not always the case, today I consider myself to be an acculturated success story mostly because I have open, understanding parents, and an older sister who kicked down a few doors for me. It's been a long and arduous journey, however. Being a first generation Canadian has its benefits: I have had the chance to get the best of both worlds. I still face new challenges every day, but real triumph has been possible through building a solid foundation – and for me, that began at home.

* Last names have been changed.

Introduction

Each year, about 200,000 immigrants arrive in Canada and about one-third are children and youth under the age of 25.¹ In 1998, for example, among the 174,100 people who immigrated to Canada, about 65,140 were under 25 years of age, accounting for 37 per cent of this group. Many of these young people came to Canada as dependants, accompanied by their families. Some came on their own to attend school or for work.

Whether they came by themselves or with their families, these children and youth left behind friends and relatives, and a familiar social system. Compared to adults, immigrant children and youth face unique challenges – most notably, getting used to the school system in Canada and balancing the cultural values and behaviour expected of children and youth in their home country with those of their new country.

While most studies on immigrants have tended to focus on the acculturation process for adults, there is little available research about how recent young immigrants are faring.² This report breaks new ground by assembling demographic and lifestyle data about this growing group of young Canadians, as well as reporting on the young peoples' own views of their experiences in Canada and those of social, health and educational service providers.

This report is organized into four sections:

SECTION I profiles the socio-demographic characteristics of immigrant children and youth, exploring where these recent immigrants have come from, their official language abilities, where they settle, and their socio-economic status.

SECTION II describes some of the differences in lifestyle between immigrant and Canadian-born youth by analyzing available data on their social supports, spirituality, patterns of balancing school and work, as well as their use of tobacco and alcohol.

SECTION III presents young immigrants talking about their experiences integrating into Canada. This section contains a summary of focus group discussions with 50 immigrant youth who have been in Canada for five years or less. The focus groups were conducted in Toronto, Vancouver, and Montreal by Ekos Research Associates.³

SECTION IV reports on the capacity of social service agencies to respond to the needs of immigrant children and youth and the needs of their families. This section is based on a survey conducted by the CCSD among community agencies that serve immigrant children and youth in the 13 Canadian cities with the highest proportions of immigrant families.

Arriving in Canada

Where do immigrant youth come from and where do they settle?

The majority of immigrant children and youth today come from regions other than Europe. Between 1996 and 1998, the majority of immigrants to Canada came from Asia and the Pacific region. Nearly half of the immigrant children and teens came from this area, as did more than half of the youth aged 20 to 24. One in five immigrant youth came from Africa and the Middle East. In 1998, among all immigrants, half came from the following countries or regions: the People's Republic of China, India, the Philippines, Hong Kong, Pakistan, Taiwan, Iran, Republic of Korea, United States, and Russia.

Figure 1: Source regions for immigrant children and youth, 1998

Regions	Age group		
	Under 15 yrs	15 to 19 yrs	20 to 24 yrs
Africa & Middle East	22%	22%	17%
United States	4%	1%	2%
Asia & Pacific	44%	46%	53%
Europe & United Kingdom	22%	18%	18%
South & Central America	8%	12%	9%

Source: Prepared by the Canadian Council on Social Development using custom data from Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 1999.

Among all immigrant children and youth who arrived in 1998, five of 10 live in Ontario, two of 10 live in British Columbia, and more than one of 10 live in Quebec. Most of these young immigrants planned to stay in the Toronto, Vancouver, or Montreal areas. Immigrants are attracted to these areas for two main reasons. First, following decades of immigration, many ethnic groups have established their social and

economic networks in these cities. These networks provide a vital link for the newcomers with the local community. Second, there are more opportunities for work and recreation in these large cities. In return, these urban centres have become more culturally vibrant as a result of the influx of immigrants.

Most immigrant children and youth cannot speak English or French when they arrive

Given that most immigrants between 1996 and 1998 came from countries where the official language was neither English nor French, it is not surprising that more than half of recent immigrant children and youth were unable to speak either of Canada's official languages when they arrived. Among all immigrants, those who were under the age of 15 were the least likely to understand either English or French when they arrived in Canada. More than two-thirds (71%) of those under age 15 spoke neither official language upon landing; less than one-quarter spoke English (24%), and four per cent spoke French. The proportion of immigrant children who understood French was higher among those living in Montreal than among those in Toronto or Vancouver. This may be due to the immigration policy in Quebec which encourages the entry of French-speaking immigrants. In Vancouver, 8 of 10 immigrant children under age 15 could not speak either official language when they arrived, compared to 7 of 10 young immigrants in Toronto.

Recent immigrants between the ages of 15 and 24 were more likely to know English when they arrived. This likelihood was even stronger if they came as principal applicants, rather than as dependants. Because English is part of the primary and secondary school curriculum in many countries, most of these young people had some language training prior to immigrating to Canada.

Figure 2: Official language ability by applicant status and age, 1998

Language Ability	Dependant (Under age 15)	Principal (Under age 15)	Dependant (Aged 15 to 19)	Principal (Aged 15 to 19)	Dependant (Aged 20 to 24)	Principal (Aged 20 to 24)
	%	%	%	%	%	%
English	23.92	25.92	31.85	43.72	42.25	47.77
French	4.42	2.18	3.88	5.65	3.57	4.87
Both English & French	0.53	0.27	1.15	1.60	3.22	3.67
Neither	71.07	71.58	63.09	49.03	50.85	43.69
Not Stated	0.06	0.05	0.03	0.00	0.11	0.00
Total	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%

Source: Prepared by the Canadian Council on Social Development using custom data from Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 1999.

Immigrant children and youth are more likely to live in lower-income households

Immigrants who have been in Canada for less than a decade are more likely to live in lower-income families than are those who have been in Canada for 10 years or more. According to the 1996 National Population Health Survey, over one-third of immigrants who have been in Canada for less than 10 years report that their household income is under \$20,000, compared to 16 per cent of those who have been in Canada for more than 10 years, and 17 per cent of people who are Canadian-born. Over half (56%) of Canadian-born children and youth live in households with incomes of \$40,000 or more, while only 36 per cent of recent immigrant children and youth do so.

Other research has shown that it generally takes newcomers to Canada 10 years to become fully comfortable in their new country and for their income to reach the average level.⁴ Recent immigrants – especially those who have been in the country for five years or less – often experience a difficult adjustment period as they look for jobs and settle into a new culture, so it is not surprising that their incomes are lower than average.

Lifestyle Patterns of Immigrant Youth

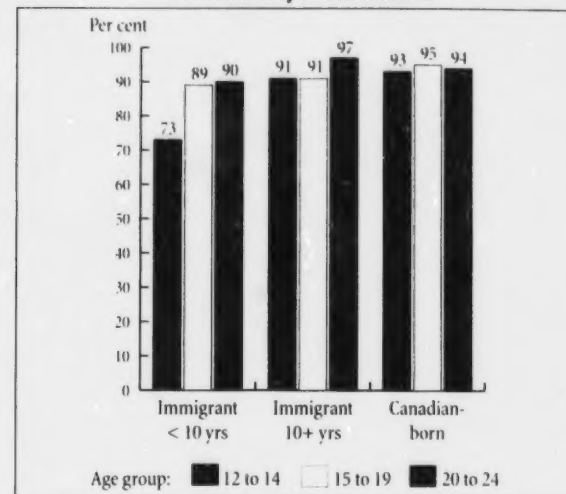
Social supports and spirituality

Personal relationships with family and friends have a strong impact on young people's physical and emotional health. Young people tend to turn to their peers for support in times of need, and as they grow up, these relationships take on more prominence in their lives.⁵ According to an international study using the *Health Behaviour in School-Aged Children Survey*, young people who are not socially well integrated are far more likely to manifest physical and mental health problems. The study found that students who had good friends in whom they could confide and with whom they could share activities were more likely to have confidence in themselves, to be well-adjusted at school, and to get along with their parents.

Research from the 1996 National Population Health Survey indicates that the majority of children and youth in Canada feel that they have someone to count on in times of crisis or when they need to make important decisions. However, recent young immigrants are less likely to say that they have someone in whom they can confide. This may be because it takes time to develop close friendships and those that they had developed earlier were left behind when they immigrated.

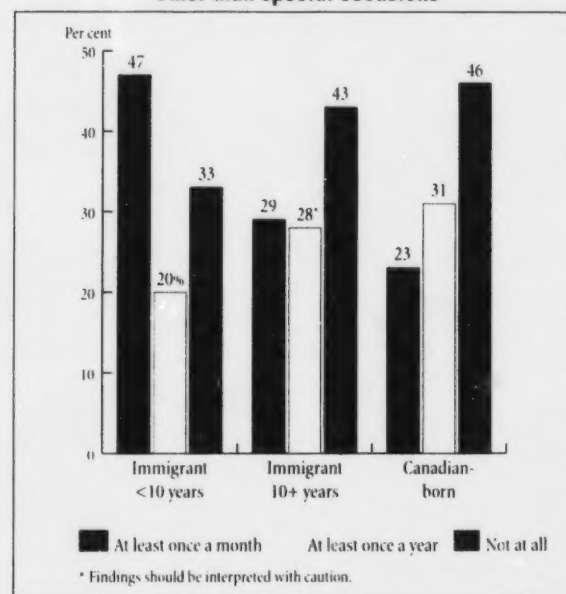
Young people also find social support through involvement with voluntary organizations or through their religious affiliations. Both immigrant and non-immigrant children and youth are involved in voluntary organizations in Canada, but immigrant youth tend to be more active in religious organizations, compared to the Canadian-born young people. And recent immigrant youth attach greater importance to religion – nearly three-quarters of them say

Figure 3: Proportion who said they had someone in whom they could confide



Source: Prepared by the Canadian Council on Social Development using data from the National Population Health Survey, 1996.

Figure 4: Frequency of attending religious services, other than special occasions



Source: Prepared by the Canadian Council on Social Development using data from the National Population Health Survey, 1996.

that religion or spirituality plays an important role in their lives. By comparison, just over half of Canadian-born youth say the same. As the time they reside in Canada grows, young people's focus on religion tends

to decline. Only nine per cent of Canadian-born youth describe themselves as very religious, compared to 16 per cent of youth who have lived in Canada for 10 years or more, and 22 per cent of those who have been in the country for less than 10 years.

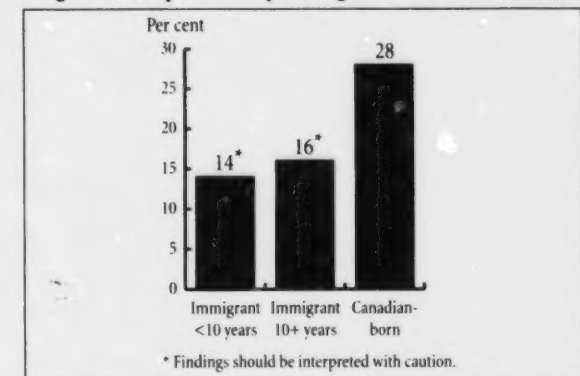
More than one-third (35%) of recent immigrant children and youth attend religious services at least once a week. In contrast, 23 per cent of young people who have been in Canada for 10 years or more attend religious services weekly, as do 16 per cent of Canadian-born youth. For most recent immigrants, religious organizations help them to establish a social network, and many churches offer activities for children and youth, with some even offering services in languages other than English or French.

Recent immigrant youth are less likely to use tobacco or alcohol

Smoking rates among young people are high and have been growing in recent years in Canada,⁶ presenting a significant health risk to this group. In addition, the majority of Canadian youth aged 15 to 24 also drink alcohol occasionally or regularly.⁷ Immigrant youth are less likely to smoke or drink than Canadian-born youth. However, as they adapt to Canadian society, immigrant youth begin to adopt the same patterns of alcohol and tobacco use as their Canadian-born peers. Over one in 10 youth aged 12 to 24 who had been in Canada for less than 10 years smoke, but these figures increase to nearly three in 10 for Canadian-born youth.

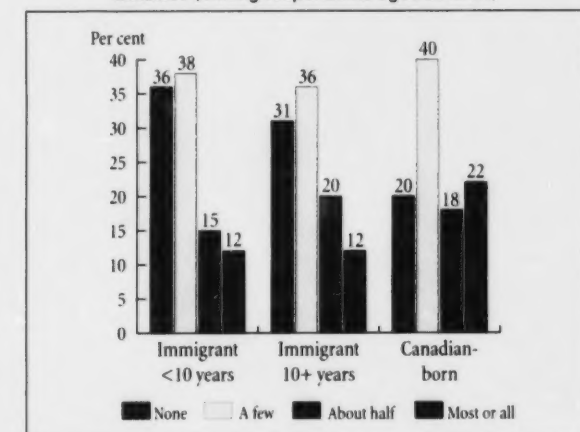
The trend towards alcohol consumption is similar to that of smoking. Alcohol use is most prevalent among Canadian-born youth, followed by young immigrants who have lived in Canada for 10 years or more. Young immigrants who have lived in Canada for less than 10 years are the least likely to drink. Among youth who drink alcohol, Canadian-born youth are more likely to drink regularly than are immigrant youth, and Canadian-born youth are more likely to drink more

Figure 5: Proportion of youth aged 12 to 24 who smoke



Source: Prepared by the Canadian Council on Social Development using data from the National Population Health Survey, 1996.

Figure 6: How many of your friends or acquaintances smoke? (among respondents aged 20 to 24)

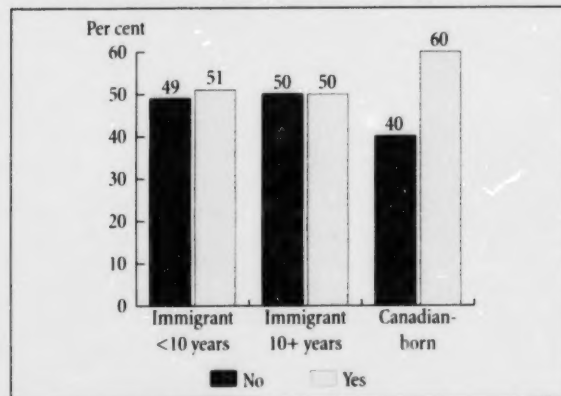


Source: Prepared by the Canadian Council on Social Development using data from the National Population Health Survey, 1996.

heavily. In 1996, six in 10 Canadian-born youth reported that they had had at least one heavy drinking episode in the previous year – consuming five or more drinks at one sitting. This compares to only three in 10 among immigrant youth.

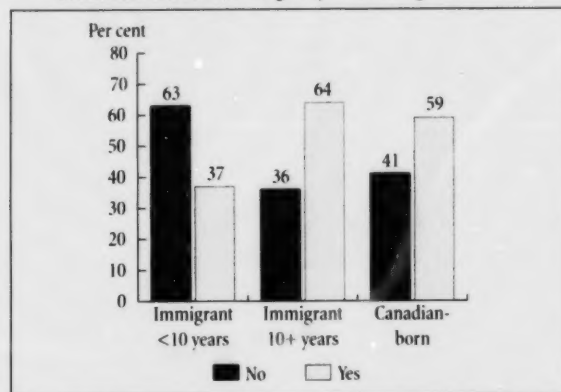
Young people's smoking and drinking behaviour is often influenced by their peers. Many immigrant youth probably do not have many friends or acquaintances who smoke or drink, but as they become more integrated into Canadian society, they are more likely to adapt to the lifestyles and habits of the local youth.

Figure 7: Do you have friends or acquaintances who drink too much? (among respondents aged 20 to 24)



Source: Prepared by the Canadian Council on Social Development using data from the National Population Health Survey, 1996.

Figure 8: Do you have friends or acquaintances who drink too much? (among respondents aged 15 to 19)



Source: Prepared by the Canadian Council on Social Development using data from the National Population Health Survey, 1996.

They will also have more friends who smoke or drink. More than one-third of immigrant youth have no friends or acquaintances who smoke, compared to 20 per cent of youth born in Canada. One in five Canadian-born youth say that almost all of the people with whom they socialize are smokers. Only one in 10 immigrant youth make this claim. Among foreign-born high school students, research shows that the probability of alcohol use increases along with the number of years that they have lived in Canada.⁸ Compared to recent immigrant youth, Canadian-born

youth and immigrant teens who have been in Canada for more than 10 years are more likely to have friends or acquaintances who drink too much.

Immigrant youth are less likely to combine work and school

Completing high school is critically important in today's knowledge- and technology-based economy. It is a key to reducing unemployment. A young adult's ability to find work and achieve an independent lifestyle is strongly linked to their education and skills.

Immigrant youth aged 15 to 19 are just as likely as Canadian-born youth to stay in school. However, immigrants aged 20 to 24 are more likely to be in school than are their Canadian-born peers. Only 37 per cent of Canadian-born youth aged 20 to 24 are currently attending school, compared to 54 per cent of immigrants in this age group who have been in Canada for less than 10 years and 50 per cent of immigrant youth who have been in Canada for 10 years or more.

Combining school and work is far more prevalent among Canadian-born youth aged 15 to 19 than it is among recent immigrants of that age. More than half of Canadian-born teens hold a job while going to school full-time or part-time, compared to one-quarter of immigrant teens who have lived in Canada for less than 10 years.

The pattern is similar for youth aged 20 to 24. Among this group, 79 per cent of Canadian-born students and 80 per cent of foreign-born students who have been in Canada for 10 years or more work while continuing to study full-time or part-time, but less than half of those who have been in Canada for less than 10 years do so. Again, these differences in lifestyle behaviours converge as foreign-born youth become more integrated into their new country.

In Their Own Words

Sections I and II provide a statistical portrait of immigrant youth in Canada, giving the reader a sense of who they are, where they have come from, and some of their lifestyle habits. But to better understand the lives of immigrant youth in Canada, the CCSD commissioned focus groups of young immigrants to ask about their own perspectives on their lives here. While the experiences voiced by these young people cannot be generalized to all immigrant youth, their perceptions illuminate the experience of their lives in Canada.

A total of six groups were held in Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver. These cities were chosen because they are home to over two-thirds of all young immigrants aged 15 to 24. All of the participants in the focus groups had arrived in Canada within the previous five years.

The young people in the groups were divided according to their ages – those aged 15 to 19 and groups of young immigrants aged 20 to 24. Each group contained one or two young people who had arrived in Canada as refugees. The proportions of young people in the groups also reflected the proportions of immigrants to Canada by region of origin. In Montreal, group discussions were conducted in French. In addition, interviews were conducted with two English-speaking immigrants, in order to obtain some insight into potential difficulties encountered by non-French-speaking immigrants living in Quebec. In total, 50 young people participated in the focus groups.⁹

Overall, participants appeared to be well integrated into Canadian society. In some cases, participants had learned to speak the language in less than two years, recounting their tribulations and triumphs with only the faintest accent and clad in the latest youth fashions. The rapidity and success with which most

young immigrants seem to have adapted to their new country is testimony to the human spirit and ability to cope.

Learning the language was the primary challenge cited by most of the young people. Younger participants also spoke about the difficulties they faced integrating into high school, while older participants said obtaining employment was their main challenge. Although the majority of participants seemed well adapted to Canada, it was apparent that their sense of belonging to the country was weak, undermined by a strong sense of attachment to their country of origin. Typically, participants described Canada in positive, yet dispassionate tones, emphasizing the economic advantages it offered while describing how they missed their family and friends "back home."

"It's just so different here. Everything is different." The vast majority of young immigrants felt that they would never "feel Canadian." For some, this was a conscious decision. *"I don't want to give up being Chinese; it's who I am."* Others felt that speaking with an accent and the fact that they were not born in Canada meant that they could never feel truly Canadian.

Among focus group participants, the use of services designed to help immigrants was uneven. Some said that these services were unnecessary, while others indicated that they did not know such services existed, and they had relied more on the informal networks of friends and family already living in Canada. Those who had accessed formal support services, however, spoke very positively about their experiences.

General perceptions of Canada

Focus group participants most often identified "freedom" and "opportunity" as the "best things" about living in Canada. For some young immigrants, freedom meant the increased liberation from their parents which they had gained by moving to a more permissive society. *"In my country, people my age don't*

date, but here it's normal. My mother doesn't like it, but she understands that we are in Canada now." For others, freedom related more to human rights and freedom from state-sponsored oppression. "Here you can do whatever you want and nobody bothers you. You won't be persecuted for your beliefs or opinions."

There was a general consensus that Canada offered much greater economic opportunities – "There are more jobs here." Many of the younger participants spoke about what they considered to be relatively easy access to post-secondary education. "Here, you can get student loans." Participants also liked what they described as Canada's multicultural and relatively tolerant society, one in which immigrants were not pressured to abandon their roots. "When I want to be Indian, I can be Indian, and when I want to be Canadian, I can be that too, but I don't feel like I have to be Canadian all the time. It's OK to do that here."

It was more difficult for participants to identify aspects of Canadian society that they did not like. Given that most of these young people had grown up in countries with a much longer history than Canada's (see Appendix 1), it is not surprising that a few participants lamented what they perceived to be Canada's lack of history and culture. "This country is what, only 100 years old?" Perhaps surprisingly, many participants said they did not like the fact that taxes were high in Canada.

There was one aspect of Canadian society that most participants did not like: the consumer culture and the unrestrained pursuit of wealth and status symbols. "Here it's all about money. At my school, if you have money and the right clothes you are cool. In Poland, people decide whether or not you are cool based on the sort of person that you are." It was apparent from the discussions that many young immigrants felt that Canada's consumer culture was a particularly cruel aspect of society to contend with, given that their families did not have much money.

Integration

Participants spoke of a wide range of experiences after coming to Canada. The extent to which they found these experiences difficult appears to be directly related to their ability to speak one of the country's official languages when they arrived. The majority of young immigrants indicated that their first year in Canada was "very difficult." In addition to the severe challenge that many faced in not being able to speak the language well – or often, not at all – participants said that they were often home sick and they felt socially isolated in Canada. "I remember the first year was very tough. I left all my friends and when I came here, I stayed in the house a lot. I didn't know anybody. I remember wanting to go back, but I couldn't because my parents had decided that we would live in Canada now." "I'm still ashamed of the way I speak English. I know I have an accent and that makes me shy to talk to people."

For younger participants, home was often a place of refuge, while school could be a traumatic experience. "When I first went to school, people made fun of me and my Polish friend. They called us 'Pollocks.' But now it's OK." A number of participants in the Toronto focus groups spoke about how their schools were sometimes divided along ethnic lines. "At our school, you've got the Greeks and the Latino kids, and then you've got the white kids. The groups don't like each other, so there are fights all the time." Young immigrants who came to Canada with a solid grasp of English (or French, among those living in Montreal) seemed to have adapted much more easily. "I really had no problems fitting in. I knew English because my mother was an English professor in Croatia."

Many young immigrants travelled similar paths of integration into Canadian society. Typically, a few friends and family members who were already established in Canada served as their guides, introducing them to Canadian life and to people of different ethnic backgrounds, including "Canadians." "At first I just had Greek friends, but they introduced me to Canadian kids

and we started to hang around together." The English-language classes also served as an important medium of integration. Here, new arrivals felt more comfortable being with other youth who shared their experiences and hardships. In some cases, participants described how they gravitated to other youth who came from their country of origin. "The first day my brother and I went to school, word got around that there were some new Russian kids in the school, so all the Russian kids came to my class to see who I was. I started to hang around with them immediately."

What's a Canadian?

For a number of young immigrants in the focus groups, a Canadian was thought to be a white person of Anglo-Saxon descent who had been born in Canada. Similarly, in the Quebec focus groups, there was some agreement among the older immigrants that a true Québécois was a person of French ancestry who had been born in Quebec. Indeed, participants in the Montreal focus groups were generally of the view that it was probably more difficult for immigrants to feel a part of Quebec society than it was for immigrants in other parts of the country to feel Canadian.

The majority of young immigrants indicated that they now felt comfortable in Canada and they expected to continue to adapt as their language skills developed further. Most, however, said that they did not "feel Canadian" and did not ever expect to feel truly Canadian. Many focus group participants began this aspect of the discussion by noting that they were unsure about what being Canadian meant. "What is a Canadian, really?" Many believed that one's country of birth determined your identity for life. According to this view, only people who were born in Canada were truly Canadian. Others saw the issue more in terms of their ability to integrate. "As long as I have an accent, I don't think I can feel really Canadian."

Feeling Canadian, for some participants, was less important to them than feeling comfortable being who they wanted to be while living in Canada. Most felt that

this was acceptable to native-born Canadians. "It's not important to me. I call myself a Greek-Canadian and people don't have a problem with that."

It's tougher on my parents

Most focus group participants who had immigrated with their parents agreed that it was much more difficult for their parents to integrate into Canadian society. Some of these difficulties related to a lack of fluency in English or French, while others involved getting accreditation for their training or degrees earned in their country of origin. Learning English or French was, by far, the most difficult challenge for their parents. "My father has been in Vancouver for five years and he still can't speak English." Obtaining employment was also described as a huge barrier faced by their parents. "It took a long time for my mother to get a job. Even now she still only works part-time." Indeed, a few participants said that one of their parents had moved back to their country of origin because they felt that life was too difficult in Canada, particularly with respect to obtaining employment. A number of participants also lamented the fact that their parents were forced to take what they considered to be menial jobs, either because their grasp of English or French was insufficient, or because their academic credentials and work experience counted for very little in Canada. "In Algeria, my father owned businesses. Here, he is unemployed." "At home my father was an engineer. Here all he can get are odd jobs."

While young immigrants were generally reluctant to discuss the details of difficulties they endured at home, it was apparent that the frustrations felt by their parents had had a significant impact on the young people. "My father was very depressed for a long time. He still can't find a job, but he knows that my mother and I are safe and that seems to be enough for him."

For the majority of young immigrants, North American culture was both a boon and a bane. As mentioned earlier, most were bothered by what they considered to be Canadian society's emphasis on

material achievement. The importance that young people in Canada placed on the trappings of wealth – such as clothes, cars, cellular telephones, and jewellery – made the immigrants' integration more difficult, since most of them had little disposable income. On the other hand, most said that they liked the relative freedom that young people enjoyed in Canada and many were capitalizing on it. *"My parents don't like me going out and they're always wanting to know who I'm with, or they want me to bring my brother, but I don't. I go out with my friends and they accept it."*

While many focus group participants acknowledged that the use of drugs and alcohol was fairly widespread among youth, most did not feel imperilled by this. *"I come from Pakistan and for my parents, drugs are the worst thing. They want me to stay away from them and I do."* A number of immigrants noted that drugs, alcohol and sex were a part of youth culture in many countries, including their countries of origin. A few even felt that their home country was more permissive than Canadian society. *"In Croatia, kids do what they want. Here there are more rules."*

We're always terrorists in the movies

Many young immigrants felt that people from their country were often negatively depicted in films, television and in the news media. Black and Hispanic people, they said, were portrayed as gangsters and criminals, and Russians as *"lovers of vodka"* and arms dealers. Immigrants from Algeria felt that Muslims and North Africans were portrayed as terrorists; Haitians and Africans were stereotyped as impoverished and uneducated. *"You would think that everyone in Africa is starving to death and living in huts. That's not the case. In the cities, for example, we have things like mass transit systems."* Indo-Pakistani people were said to be depicted as grovelling shopkeepers. *"Well, there's Apu on the Simpsons."* While the focus group participants clearly felt that the use of stereotypes to depict immigrants, foreigners and visible minorities was a sad commentary on the state of North American culture, most were not overly bothered by the stereo-

types. In fact, many participants chuckled when expressing their views on this issue.

If you forget your roots, you forget who you are

Almost all young immigrants said that it was very important for them to maintain their culture, heritage and language. Many had trouble imagining not doing so. *"It's who I am."* *"It's part of me."* There was agreement among the young people that their homeland's language, culture and traditions formed an important part of their personal identity. *"If you forget your roots, you forget who you are."* Quite a few also said that they intended to pass on their heritage to their children.

The extent to which the focus group participants were making an effort to maintain their culture and language varied a great deal. Most made no additional efforts beyond speaking with their parents and friends in their native language and reading the odd book or magazine from their country of origin. Others made an effort to attend religious services. *"The Mosque is the place where we keep in touch with our roots."* Some said they participated in community activities such as parties or receptions where their traditions were practised and the language spoken, while a few attended classes given in their native language.

Focus group participants' access to the media of their country of origin was also quite uneven. Those who belonged to some of Canada's largest immigrant groups – such as Chinese or Indian – had easier access to a variety of cultural products, including television programming. At the other end of the spectrum, some participants had to rely on relatives to send them CDs or reading material from their country of origin. *"Once in a while, my uncle will send us a bunch of newspapers."* Overall, participants did not appear to be concerned that they would have difficulty maintaining their culture and language.

Racism

The issue of racism was raised spontaneously in all of the focus groups. Often it arose as part of the discussions about negative aspects of Canada. Younger participants in particular felt that the police and, more significantly, teachers could be racists. Even participants who did not raise the issue themselves and those who had not faced racism from teachers agreed that certain teachers and school administrators seemed to single out certain students or groups of students for harsher treatment based on their ethnicity. *"I have a teacher who hates the Hispanic kids."* *"Teachers don't like me because I am Greek."* *"I had a teacher who deducted 20 points from an oral presentation I gave because of my accent. She said that she marked everyone on their diction and she was going to treat me just like the others because it was the only way I was ever going to learn."* *"If a white kid does something and I do the same thing, there is no question that I'm going to get into worse trouble. In fact, teachers don't even bother with me. I go to the principal's office for the slightest offence."*

Some participants felt that the police "hassled" them because they were "dark-skinned." *"My friend and I get stopped all the time, for nothing. He looks like me, he's tall, dark and has 'dreads'."* *"I get the feeling that police are always looking at us suspiciously, but my friends and I don't do anything wrong."* Participants agreed that it was difficult to tell whether the discrimination they perceived to be coming from authority figures was based on the fact that they were immigrants or because they were members of visible minority groups. *"I think it's probably both."*

Younger immigrants agreed that racism was also a problem among students in high school. A number of participants recounted how other students had taunted them, especially when they first arrived. *"My accent was pretty bad when I first got here and some kids would say 'why don't you go back to Russia'."* In Vancouver, younger participants who had emigrated from China said that they were often picked on or

ostracized by Canadians of Chinese decent. *"These kids are Chinese, but they were born here. They call us Chinks."* It seems that in a number of high schools, cliques have developed along racial lines.

Some older immigrant youth spoke of the discrimination and bigotry they had faced in trying to find employment. This seemed to be of particular concern among participants in the Montreal focus groups.

The young immigrants' main reaction to the racism and bigotry they encountered was to ignore it. It was also apparent that the racism and rejection they felt from Canadian-born people led some immigrants to retreat to their ethnic community and strengthen their relationships with people of their same ethnic background.

While most focus group participants – and almost all of those who were members of visible minority groups – had experienced racism or bigotry in Canada, it is important to note that only a few felt that it was a very serious problem. The majority were rather philosophical about the issue, noting that racism and bigotry are found in all countries and cultures, and thus, one could not expect Canada to be exempt from this problem. Many also pointed out that, compared to other countries, Canada's multicultural makeup likely made racism less of a problem here. In terms of solutions, several participants felt that efforts to promote tolerance and understanding should be focussed on schools and aimed at both teachers and students.

At school

Younger participants, as well as some of the older participants who attended high schools in Canada, described school as the focal point of their lives. According to these young people, school can be a fairly traumatic place for immigrants. They also spoke about the crucial role that schools can play in the integration process. Many described being thrust into a "sink or

swim" situation – having to learn the language and make friends quickly.

While almost all the focus group participants agreed that the school experience can be shocking and difficult initially, most agreed that it helped them to adjust quickly to Canadian society, much more quickly than their parents, for example. *"They put me in a class and I didn't speak a word of English. I couldn't follow in class, except for some math and I couldn't talk to anyone, but I worked hard and I caught up."*

Immigrants who came to Canada with little or no grasp of English or French were most often placed in ESL classes or the Quebec equivalent. The vast majority of focus group participants who had taken ESL classes agreed that the experience had helped them a great deal, both in terms of learning English or French and in making friends. Often these new-found friends were of the same ethnic background, or they were recent immigrants from another country. In either case, the participants said it was helpful to be with other young people who were in a similar situation.

Overall, participants in the focus groups felt that the school system had placed them in the appropriate class or level. Most said that they were given tests of their needs and abilities and that their academic records were part of the school's evaluation. A few participants said they were not placed in the right school level, most often, it seems, because they did not have the appropriate academic records. *"I only had a couple of documents, but they wanted report cards going back to grade school. They also gave me a test, but I was not prepared for it and did poorly. I think I ended up two grades behind where I should have been."*

Services

In the focus group discussions, young people were asked about their experiences with services in their communities. Services were broadly defined as school services (such as seeing a guidance counsellor); health

services; welfare or social assistance services; youth services, clubs, or organizations; and immigrant services, both community-based and government-operated. The use of such services varied significantly from one participant to another. While most indicated that they had accessed some type of service during their time in Canada, it seemed that only a handful had relied heavily on them.

Most participants had visited a physician and a number of participants' families had received social assistance. Few had seen a school guidance counsellor and, in fact, quite a number of participants said they would "never" see a guidance counsellor because they did not trust them. *"They talk to the principal. I went to see one and he told my whole story to the principal."* It seems that as with teachers, police and school administrators, guidance counsellors are viewed as somewhat untrustworthy, and perceived to be part of a system to monitor and control young people, not help them. As was found in other research on youth conducted by Ekos, the young immigrants in these focus groups said that if they found themselves confronted by a serious problem, they would turn to a friend for help.

Many participants indicated that the health professionals they had dealt with were members of their own ethnic group. In most instances, their parents had made the selection. The young people said they were glad to be able to deal with health professionals who spoke their native language because it made communications easier. *"For medical problems and stuff like that, you want to be comfortable, so it helps to be able to talk in your own language."*

Many young immigrants said that they and their families relied a great deal on support and guidance from other family members and friends, as well as from other members of their ethnic group who were already living in Canada. *"When I came here, I went to a Japanese food store. There was advertising for sharing an apartment. As it turned out, the girl was Japanese*

too. She helped me a lot at first." *"It wasn't too bad for us because we had family already here when we arrived. We relied on them a lot."*

Other participants explained how they obtained assistance from programs and volunteer groups that assist immigrants. *"My mom goes to a place that's run by a woman who helps immigrants. At Christmas, they have food and presents, like chocolate, for kids."* Other focus group participants had used services such as social assistance or they had participated in job-finding clubs and resume-preparation workshops – services that are aimed at all members of the public, not just immigrants.

As noted earlier, school services that target immigrant students were generally grouped under ESL or other language class activities. Most young immigrants who had participated in these classes acknowledged that the programs were a good way to learn the language and facilitated their integration into the school and society. *"This is pretty good. I don't think they can do any better."* However, the level of services and programs available to immigrant students seemed to vary from one school to another.

Perhaps the best example of a service which seemed to help young immigrants to integrate into Canadian society was described by a number of younger participants in the Montreal and Vancouver focus groups. Identified by one participant as a *"buddy program,"* it was described as a type of social club for immigrant youth. Youth members of the organization met regularly, mainly it seems, to go on outings together. *"Sometimes you go swimming, sometimes you go to a movie. It's all free."* All those who had participated in this type of a program agreed that it worked very well. The groups provided them with an opportunity to have fun and make friends with other youth who shared the common experience of immigrating to Canada. The groups also allowed the youth to enjoy activities that they might otherwise not be able to afford, and to practice their English or French with others who shared their fears of having to express

themselves to Canadian-born speakers. It is important to note that some participants in the Montreal focus groups said that their classes for French as a Second Language provided them with similar opportunities, including the occasional group outing.

Most of the other young immigrants in the focus groups who had not heard about these types of community-based programs said that they would have been interested in participating in such programs, and perhaps still would. Given that social isolation is an early and major hurdle faced by most immigrant youth, these types of programs appear to represent both an appropriate and effective response to this particular problem.

Relatively few focus group participants were active in any type of community or cultural organizations. Most participants said that they and members of their family met people of their ethnic group at religious services, in ethnic restaurants, or at the occasional social event. *"We get together for Chile's independence day. We eat traditional foods, dance and talk about home."* *"We go to this Russian restaurant. A lot of people from Russia go there."*

Do Community Services Respond to the Needs of New Immigrants?

Even though many of the focus group participants were unfamiliar with the social services available to them, service organizations and community-based agencies play an important role in the adaptation of immigrant children, youth and families in Canada. As shown in recent studies, most of these organizations are aware of the diverse cultural profile in their communities and most have a mandate to address the needs of newcomers.¹⁰ But delivering culturally appropriate services and reaching out to the different cultural communities is often a challenge. In recent years, many organizations have also been faced with demands to restructure their services and reduce their spending.

In order to assess the experiences and perceptions of service providers, the Canadian Council on Social Development surveyed 88 agencies across Canada that provide services for children, youth and their families who have immigrated to Canada within the last five years. The survey was conducted throughout the summer of 1999. The agencies were located in the 13 Canadian cities where 85% of all immigrant children and youth live.¹¹ The agencies included boards of education (15), community health centres (15), social services/child welfare agencies (14), police departments (9), public health departments and CLSCs (11), community-based agencies serving immigrant children and families (22), and other agencies (2).¹²

More than one-third of the agencies estimated that up to 25 per cent of their clients were born outside Canada. One in five organizations estimated that between 26 and 50 per cent of their clients were foreign-born. The size of the organizations ranged from fewer than 10 employees to more than 150. Almost half (47 per cent) had over 150 full-time staff. Almost all of the organizations had volunteers – the majority of them had more than 50 active volunteers.

Difficulties in accessing social services

Eight in 10 of these organizations said that they had identified barriers to service access among immigrants. The three most commonly identified barriers were language, cultural differences, and a lack of knowledge among potential users about the services.

Language was the most commonly identified barrier. Nearly half of the organizations surveyed estimated that for up to 25 per cent of their clients, their first language was neither English nor French. Another 17 per cent of service organizations said that about half of their clients spoke a first language other than English or French. Most organizations reported that their staff did not have the language capability to serve all

Figure 9: How many of your clients were born outside of Canada?

Type of organization	Up to half	More than half	Don't know/ No response	Total
Boards of Education	14	1	-	15
Community-based agencies serving immigrants	-	21	1	22
Community Health Centres	9	5	1	15
Social Services/Child Welfare Dept./Agency	12	1	1	14
Police Departments	5	-	4	9
Public Health Dept./CLSC	6	1	4	11

Source: Canadian Council on Social Development's Survey of Services for Immigrant Children, Youth and Families, 1999.

immigrant clients in their native tongues, they did not have cultural and linguistic interpreters available, nor did they have print resources available in all of the languages required.

Given the diverse linguistic profile of recent immigrants, it is unrealistic to expect an agency to have the capacity to provide services in all of the languages spoken by their clients – especially in the large, culturally diverse urban centres. And while interpretation services could be helpful, some agencies reported a lack of funding for such services. To do so, agencies would need to hire a qualified cultural interpreter who was familiar with both the Canadian system and the immigrant's home country. In some cities, for example, a cultural interpreter could cost between \$40 and \$45 per hour.

In addition to language barriers, organizations identified cultural barriers that prevented new immigrants from accessing their services. These cultural barriers took on a number of faces. The kinds of services that were available in the immigrants' countries of origin, the organization of those services, and their values base and standards were often very different than what is available in Canada. This was particularly so with regard to services in the areas of education, child welfare and policing. An earlier study among students from Southeast Asia showed that most students, having come from the Asian school system which was considered authoritarian, now found it challenging to adapt to the Canadian school system, which emphasized classroom participation. These concerns often caused the students to feel stressed about their academic and social environments.¹³

The CCSD survey of service providers indicated that many recent immigrants were unfamiliar with the way services are offered in Canada. This lack of familiarity often led to misunderstandings, and even fears and suspicions on the part of the intended beneficiaries. As one service respondent said, "Our clients do not have a comparative, formalized child welfare system in their

country. They do not understand our legislative roles. They are afraid of child welfare." Another service provider wrote: "Our clients distrust the police, because there is a low regard for police in the countries they come from. They don't understand the role of the police." Other services, such as support groups or play groups, simply did not exist in some immigrants' countries of origin.

Service agencies frequently noted that the composition of their staff created another barrier for immigrants. Some agencies were aware that the cultural composition of their staff did not reflect the cultural diversity of the agency's clients. They also noted that staff often did not have a full understanding of their clients' cultural differences, the clients' lives or their experiences. Even when immigrants come to an agency, they may not receive the quality of service desired due to a lack of services in their mother tongue or a lack of personnel to whom they can relate. As one service provider noted, "Although various immigrant support services are in place in our community, it seems there are insufficient numbers of professionals from diverse ethno-cultural communities working in areas such as counselling and health care. Recent immigrants need to be provided services in the languages they understand best, and they need to be able to work with those who understand their cultures."

Service providers also reported that recent immigrants are often simply unaware of the services that exist in their community.

Most agencies have made efforts to facilitate access

Recognizing that there are barriers which inhibit immigrants from accessing the services designed to help them, almost all of the organizations surveyed said they had made efforts to reduce those barriers using a variety of approaches. The most common were outreach activities aimed at recent immigrants. These outreach activities ranged from promotion of the

service programs via the media and through other agencies, to consultations with community members to determine the needs, and community development activities where members of various immigrant communities defined their service needs. Other approaches included using linguistic and cultural interpreters, translating agency brochures into the languages of the immigrant community, and hiring staff and volunteers from among the various ethno-cultural groups that the agency served. Many agencies also reported that they had developed specific resources and programs to address particular issues. Examples included ethno-specific and language-specific parenting programs, job training programs, ESL classes, and celebrations of various cultural events.

Specific initiatives to serve immigrants

More than two-thirds of the organizations surveyed (72%) had developed specific initiatives to increase mutual understanding between immigrant communities and the mainstream social organizations. The types of initiatives developed depended on the type of service agency. While two-thirds of the boards of education and community health centres had such programs, less than half of social service agencies and police departments had developed such initiatives.

Community-based agencies that specifically served immigrants all offered programs to help newcomers integrate into Canadian society. Some agencies provided information on intercultural communications, Canadian history, transportation, food, clothing, and community resources. Others offered opportunities for recent immigrants to get together and talk about values between different societies, integration, racism and discrimination. Some agencies also offered job search workshops, employment training, vocational rehabilitation, housing, and ESL classes. A number of community-based organizations that

served specific cultural groups provided drop-in centres for children and youth. These centres had a variety of objectives, including socialization and the development of social supports; recreational opportunities; encouragement of language development; and provision of information on topics such as health and social issues.

Specific initiatives identified by boards of education primarily involved classes in English as a Second Language (ESL) for elementary and secondary school students and adults, as well as continuing and community education classes. Ten of the 15 boards surveyed indicated that they offered such services. Community health centres reported providing health promotion programs for immigrant parents and youth that included such activities as prenatal classes, parenting groups, community kitchens, nutrition programs, drop-in opportunities for young women, and support groups. Public health departments reported providing interpretation services and services for new mothers. The services provided by health agencies appeared to be more frequently geared to young families rather than to older children and youth.

Some social service departments offered help in languages other than English and French. These included courses on job search techniques, ESL classes, cross-cultural parenting, and new friends groups. To reach out to immigrants in their community, some police departments had set up liaisons with various immigrant groups.

Staff development

Many service agencies reported that they had invested efforts to better equip their staff to serve immigrant communities. These efforts included diversity training for staff, recruiting staff from among different cultural backgrounds, and establishing a system to collect feedback from their clients.

Nine in 10 organizations surveyed provided cultural diversity training for their staff. Half of these organizations (53%) reported that the training was required of all staff, and 15 per cent said that the training was mandatory for some staff. One-third of the organizations said the diversity training was optional.

Among boards of education, 14 out of 15 provided diversity training at least once a year. The training included anti-racism and cultural awareness workshops, as well as professional development courses for ESL teachers. All 15 community health centres (CHCs) provided diversity workshops and anti-racism seminars, with some centres offering such training once every three years, and others running such programs almost every month. Among police departments, eight of nine provided some cross-cultural training, although one department reported losing their program due to funding cutbacks. Five police departments required all new recruits to undergo such training as part of their basic training.

In addition to raising cultural awareness, many service organizations have made efforts to ensure that the cultural composition of staff in their agency reflected their clients. Nearly half of the organizations surveyed said that they had some staff who were of the same ethnic community as their clients; almost half (45%) said that most of their staff were of the same ethnic background as their clients; and 6 per cent said that all of their staff were of the same ethnic background as their clients. The majority of these were community-based agencies specifically serving immigrants.

Listening to clients

Nearly two-thirds (61%) of the organizations reported that they systematically collect feedback from their clients in order to ensure that their services improved over time. Most organizations (80%) did this in a formal way, and 20 per cent did it informally. Community-based agencies serving immigrants were the most likely to seek feedback from their clients,

followed by community health centres and public health departments. Social service departments, police departments and boards of education were the less likely to formally collect this feedback – only one-third did so.

The most common means of gathering feedback was by distributing client satisfaction surveys, either by telephone or in writing (in the appropriate language), or through focus groups. Other agencies sought feedback as a routine part of their service provision. For example, children in care were asked for feedback at the end of their placement. One board of education had an anti-racism and ethno-cultural equity committee composed of educators and community members.

Challenges in meeting the needs of recent immigrants

Despite these efforts, many service organizations were aware that they were not meeting all of needs identified by new immigrants. Many agencies also reported an increase in the number of immigrants trying to access community resources. This was especially true among community-based agencies serving immigrants, community health centres, and boards of education. At the same time, many agencies reported a decrease in their financial and human resources – further limiting their ability to address unmet needs.

When service providers were asked which of the needs among recent immigrants in their community were not currently being met, they most commonly identified needs related to family relationships, mental health, employment, language training, basic needs for food and shelter, access to health care, and the availability of professionals.

The need for supportive services for families and individuals in the areas of emotional health, family functioning and parenting was said to be far greater

Figure 10: Number of organizations indicating that recent immigrants have unmet needs

Boards of Education	11 of 15
Community-based agencies serving immigrants	21 of 22
Community Health Centres	15 of 15
Social Services/Child Welfare Dept./Agency	9 of 14
Police Departments	3 of 9
Public Health Dept./CLSC	11 of 11

Source: Canadian Council on Social Development's Survey of Services for Immigrant Children, Youth and Families, 1999.

than the services available to handle these issues. Mental and emotional health services were identified as critical needs by the service providers. *"Emotional support services are needed. And psychological services – listening to fears, being unsettled, worrying about money. These needs are increasing, and the services are not there."* *"Individual and family counselling services are not available in the languages of the immigrant populations."*

These needs were seen to be particularly important for refugees who had fled difficult circumstances in their homelands. *"There are almost no services for children and youth experiencing post-traumatic stress as a result of fleeing civil war."* *"There is a need for supporting families with children in crisis in a linguistically and culturally sensitive manner."*

Support for parenting was also identified as an unmet need. Parenting needs, how to parent, what's acceptable discipline in Canada, and assistance and understanding in how to communicate with the school system were all identified by service providers as areas needed, but lacking. *"There is inadequate access to information regarding Canadian parenting practices, the child welfare system, and the role and services*

provided by child welfare agencies." These unmet needs are often expressed in terms of intergenerational conflict. *"Social integration of immigrants into mainstream community – this is a significant problem for children and teens who are assimilating into the community, but their parents are not."* *"There are social issues related to students in their community. They are caught between traditions at home and diversity in the community."* *"There is a need for family support programs, such as parenting programs, cultural differences, intergenerational conflict."*

Helping new immigrants to find work was another major issue identified by service providers. *"There is a need for access to meaningful employment and marketable skills."* And the service providers reported that this involved more than simply securing jobs. The acceptance of foreign education, credentials, training and experience is an important component. *"Recognition of prior learning, certification of their professions, and obtaining equivalencies for education are major obstacles."* *"The need for employment training is increasing."* Employment problems were identified as being common among immigrant parents of young children and among youth. *"Youth employment is an increasing need, because of the lack of resources and the lack of Canadian experience."*

Service providers identified access to language training as another serious unmet need. With more immigrants arriving whose mother tongue is neither English nor French, the demands for ESL classes have increased. ESL is instrumental in enabling immigrant students to participate fully in school classes, however, funding for these programs has increased very little over the last few years. *"English as a second language programs for children and youth have decreased, even though the needs have grown."* *"The ESL programs in schools have been capped. To maintain basic instruction, the de-professionalization of teaching is occurring."*

Access to appropriate health care services was also considered to be a problem for immigrants. The problems varied from a lack of knowledge about the services, little understanding of them, and not being able to access services that were culturally and linguistically appropriate. *"Access to medical care is a problem."* *"There is a lack of information and education regarding the Canadian health care system and services."* *"There is a need for information regarding prevention and health promotion, for example for things like cervical cancer screening."*

A number of service providers stated that recent immigrants are struggling with basic human needs – adequate income, food and shelter.

It was commonly reported by service providers that there were not enough appropriate professionals to provide services to the recent immigrant population, mainly due to the small numbers of professionals from different ethno-cultural communities working in areas such as counselling and health care. *"Recent immigrants need to be provided with services in the languages they understand best, and to work with those who understand their cultures."*

Strategies to address the unmet needs

Nearly two-thirds of the organizations surveyed (60%) said that they had developed strategies to address these unmet needs.

The most common strategy used was to form partnerships among various service providers and community organizations. Some community health centres, for example, said that they established partnerships with other service providers. Boards of education said they would maintain and strengthen their partnerships with multicultural centres and immigrant settlement services. A number of agencies also indicated that they were lobbying federal and provincial governments for more funding. *"We are developing partnerships with the*

Figure 11: Number of organizations indicating having strategies to address unmet needs

Boards of Education	11 of 15
Community-based agencies serving immigrants	19 of 22
Community Health Centres	10 of 15
Social Services/Child Welfare Dept./Agency	5 of 14
Police Departments	1 of 9
Public Health Dept./CLSC	4 of 11

Source: Canadian Council on Social Development's Survey of Services for Immigrant Children, Youth and Families, 1999.

federal government, provincial government, foundations, and other agencies with regard to multicultural programs to enhance culturally appropriate services." *"Through our local coalition, immigrant serving agencies are developing programs."* Another strategy was to seek additional funding. *"We are lobbying the provincial government to reconsider the funding formula."* *"We are seeking funding for a major community initiative to increase the choices and opportunities for immigrant children and youth."* *"We keep writing proposals for project funding."*

Lack of resources

Even though most organizations surveyed were willing to respond to the needs of new immigrants, 87 per cent said they did not have adequate resources to serve this group. These included a lack of both financial and human resources, as the following responses indicate:

"We have too few multicultural liaison workers for some of the major ethnic groups. We have too little money to support the extent of cross-organizational cooperation that is needed."

"We lack trained professionals who represent the diverse backgrounds of those in the community in all areas related to educational supports."

"We lack clinical staff who speak the languages – foreign-trained nurses and doctors face major barriers to practicing here."

"Workload demands on staff leave little or no time to interface with ethno-specific communities in order to provide information to parents and youth."

"The needs for ESL classes appear to be growing within our area. Funding for this service is uncertain each year."

"Historically, immigrant services are underfunded and not a high priority for funding by all three levels of government."

"Services required are 'settlement' services, but we are a generalist community resource centre that is not designated as a 'settlement agency' and consequently, we cannot access the necessary funds."

"No salary increases, benefits, job security or pension plans."

In the areas of financial and human resources, nearly half (46%) of the organizations surveyed said that their financial resources had decreased and over one-third (35%) said they had experienced a drop in human resources over the last five years.

Boards of education and police departments particularly felt the decrease in financial and human resources. Of the 15 boards of education surveyed, 10 reported having decreased human resources, and 11 reported a drop in financial resources over the last five years. In a study on anti-racism, it was found that in

times of staff shortage, cultural diversity training was often overlooked by organizations such as boards of education. For example, if there was a vacancy for a cultural diversity officer in a school board and finances were tight, that position was not always filled immediately.¹⁴

Two-thirds of the police departments surveyed also indicated that they had experienced a decrease in financial resources over the last five years. Some police departments also reported that they were unable to send enough staff out into the community, pay for training for enough of their personnel, or to recruit sufficient personnel from among the ethnic communities.

Three service providers summed up the multiplicity and complexity of the issues:

"New or recent immigrants have special settlement needs and they face increased barriers due to the lack of services and information available in their mother tongue. Migrating to a new society can be a difficult transition for young parents and caregivers, especially women. They often struggle as the main caregivers, trying to provide their children with the proper emotional, financial and psychological support, usually without assistance from their extended families back home."

"Many families immigrating to Canada have multiple problems that are barriers to their new goal of adapting to a new culture. This requires stable psycho-social factors."

"Services for families and children are non-existent. Governments also ignore the fact that some immigrants may have special needs in the areas of health, housing, parenting, family life, life skills, and long-term integration issues."

Conclusion

According to the 1996 Census, young Canadians under age 25 are more culturally and ethnically diverse than are older generations.¹⁵ This trend will increase because youth form one-third of the immigrants who come to Canada each year. Most of these immigrants speak neither English nor French upon their arrival. Their experiences and backgrounds are diverse. Integrating into a new social and cultural environment requires time and effort, as well as the support of the community.

Recent immigrant youth differ from Canadian-born youth in their participation in religious activities, as well as in their smoking and drinking behaviours. With the passage of time, however, the lifestyles of these immigrant youth begin to resemble those of their Canadian-born counterparts.

This report indicates that programs which provide English or French as a second language are an effective way to integrate newcomers into Canadian society. Through these programs and the various social activities they entail, the immigrants not only learn the language, they also develop friendships with others.

Findings from this research also counter the myth that higher levels of immigration could lead to ethnic segregation. A number of immigrant youth in the focus groups said that they found ethnic-specific institutions to be helpful in their initial period of transition from one culture to another. Nevertheless, most said that they seldom participated in activities within their own ethnic communities, except for special occasions. Most immigrant youth expressed the desire to move beyond their own ethnic enclaves once they had acquired the English or French language skills. Some said that although they did not expect to carry on the traditions from their country of origin, they would retain the language. With the economy being increas-

ingly globalized, knowledge of "third language" will be useful for many of these young people.

Family reunification has been the cornerstone of Canada's recent immigration policy. Children and youth are often admitted under the family-class category. As is evident from these findings, immigrant youth generally adapt well to Canadian society over time. Adaptation, however, is a two-way street. While immigrants need to accustom themselves to their new environment, social service organizations and all other sectors of society need to provide more resources to meet the needs of their clients.

Endnotes

¹ Citizen and Immigration Canada. *Facts and Figures: Immigration Overview*, Catalogue No. I-291-06-99E, 1999.

² Kunz, Jean Lock. *Developing Current and Accurate Data and Analysis on Cultural Diversity: Results of the Roundtable Consultations*. Ottawa: Canadian Council on Social Development, 1999.

³ These three cities were chosen because they are home to over two-thirds of all young people aged 15 to 24 who were not born in Canada. All of the participants in the focus groups had arrived in Canada within the previous five years. Focus group participants were divided into groups according to their ages: those aged 15 to 19 and youth aged 20 to 24. Each group contained one or two young people who were refugees. The composition of the groups reflected the proportions of young people who have recently immigrated to Canada by their regions of origin.

⁴ Dunn, James and Isabel Dyck. *Social Determinants of Health in Canada's Immigrant Population: Results from the National Population Health Survey*. Vancouver: Vancouver Centre of Excellence, Research on Immigration and Integration in the Metropolis, Working Paper Series #98-20, 1998.

⁵ King, A.J.C.; W.F. Boyce; and M.A. King. *Trends in the Health of Canadian Youth: Health Behaviour in School-Aged Children*. Ottawa: Health Canada, 1999.

⁶ Canadian Council on Social Development. *The Progress of Canada's Children 1999/2000: Into the Millennium*. Ottawa: CCSD, 2000.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Cheung, Yuet W. "Ethnic Identification and Alcohol Use among Canadian-Born and Foreign-Born High School Students in Toronto," in *The International Journal of Addictions*, 28(11):1097-1111, 1993.

⁹ Appendix 1 shows the age and country of origin for these focus group participants.

¹⁰ Kunz, Jean Lock; Cheryl Engler; and Pierre Laliberté. *Setting Priorities in the Field of Race Relations: An environmental scan on current issues*. Toronto: Canadian Race Relations Foundation, 1999.

Kunz, Jean Lock. *Developing Current and Accurate Data and Analysis on Cultural Diversity: Results of the Roundtable Consultations*. Ottawa: Canadian Council on Social Development, 1999.

¹¹ Brampton, Vancouver, Surrey, Richmond, North Vancouver, Calgary, Edmonton, Winnipeg, Toronto, Kitchener-Waterloo, Ottawa-Carleton, Montreal, and Halifax.

¹² In total, 138 questionnaires were sent out. Therefore, the response rate was 64 per cent.

¹³ Hyman, I.; M. Beiser; S. Noh; and N. Vu. "Perceptions of stress in Southeast Asian refugee youth: Implications for the development of culturally appropriate measures," Unpublished manuscript, 1999.

¹⁴ Kunz, Jean Lock; Cheryl Engler; and Pierre Laliberté. *Setting Priorities in the Field of Race Relations: An environmental scan on current issues*. Toronto: Canadian Race Relations Foundation, 1999.

¹⁵ Mata, Fernando and J. Valentine. *Selected Profiles of Canada's Young Age Cohorts*. Strategic Research and Analysis Multiculturalism Program, Citizens' Participation and Multiculturalism, Department of Canadian Heritage, 1999.

Appendix 1: Country of origin and age group of focus group participants

COUNTRY	NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS	
	Aged 15 to 19	Aged 20 to 24
In Toronto		
United States/ Western Europe	2	
Latin America/ Caribbean	3	
Eastern & Central Europe, Middle East	3	2
Asia	5	
In Vancouver		
Russia	1	
China	3	
Hong Kong	1	
Taiwan	1	
El Salvador	1	
West Africa	2	
Korea	1	
Nigeria		1
Eritrea		1
UK		1
Spain	1	
Honduras		1
Chile	1	
In Montreal		
Russia	3	
Algeria	4	1
Uganda	1	
Romania	1	
Haiti	1	
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Pakistan		1
Japan		2

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